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Francis Marion's Last Engagement: The Avenue of the Cedars Wadboo Plantation, August 29, 1782

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By 1782 the British army in South Carolina was in Charlestown (now Charleston) with thousands of soldiers and civilians to feed. Brigadier General Francis Marion was tasked with keeping British and Loyalist troops from plundering. At the same time he wanted to avoid bloodshed and prepare for reconciliation once the British left South Carolina and peace was formalized. British Major Thomas Fraser had a different plan.



Fig. 1. Francis Marion shares a meal of sweet potatoes with a British officer. This painting by John Blake White in the 1830s and now owned by the US Senate, depicts a scene from Parson Mason L. Weems's *Life of General Francis Marion*. (Weems stated that this was a dinner, but Samuel Weaver in his Federal pension application W8993 said it was breakfast.)

The Guns of August 1782

It is a popular misconception that the American Revolutionary War ended at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, with Lord Cornwallis's surrender of the British army of the South. The fighting was indeed over in most of America, and the British began making peace overtures in response to public opposition and a new Prime Minister replacing Lord North. The fighting was far from over everywhere, however. The navy of America's ally, France, had made it a world war, while in South Carolina fighting continued as a civil war with Whig and Tory militias murdering and looting each other.

The British forces remaining in South Carolina under Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie, together with residents, loyalist refugees, and slaves, had been pushed into the area around Charlestown. Leslie's orders were simply to hold the city and avoid offensive operations, but he had to feed thousands of soldiers and civilians waiting for evacuation. Allied navies and American privateers hindered resupply by sea, and Gen. Nathanael Greene did his best to interdict trade and foraging on land. While Greene operated west of the Ashley River (Fig. 2 on p. 4), he assigned the task of blocking British supplies and subduing Tories east of the Ashley to Brigadier General Francis Marion of the South Carolina militia.¹

On August 28, 1782, with Greene's forces away from headquarters at Ashley Hill and Marion thought to be at Georgetown, Leslie seized the opportunity to send a foraging party to Moncks Corner to obtain "some fresh meat for the use of the general Hospital, which had been hitherto with difficulty supplied in that article."² Commanding this expedition into Marion's sector was Major Thomas Fraser.³

¹ See John Oller. *The Swamp Fox*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2016) for a recent biography of Marion. See also J. D. Lewis, "Evolution of Marion's Brigade After the Fall of Charlestown 1780 to 1782."

http://www.francismarionsymposium.com/Evolution_of_Marion's_Brigade_1780_to_1782_JDL.pdf

² Gen. Alexander Leslie to Gen. Sir Guy Carleton, Sep 8, 1782. New York Public Library (NYPL), Thomas Addis Emmet Collection. Series XXVII. Gen. Leslie's Letter Book.
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c02c9a3b-67b7-7080-e040-e00a180631aa#/?uuid=c02c9a3b-67b7-7080-e040-e00a180631aa>

³ For a biographical sketch of Thomas Fraser, see Ian Saberton, *The Cornwallis Papers*, (Uckfield, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2010), I:243.

Major Thomas Fraser

Thomas Fraser was born in Inverness, Scotland, in 1756, settled in New Jersey, and in August 1777 was commissioned a lieutenant in the New York Volunteers, a loyalist provincial corps. In 1780 he followed the war to South Carolina, where his service as quartermaster in Lieutenant Colonel Nesbit Balfour's detachment earned him promotion to major in the South Carolina Royalist Regiment. As provincial troops, the SC Royalists were trained and equipped like British regulars, dressed in red coats with yellow facings and white turnbacks.⁴ At Musgrove Mill on August 19, 1780, Fraser was shot out of his saddle, but he recovered and took field command of the SC Royalists. At Ratchiff's Bridge on March 6, 1781, they routed Gen. Thomas Sumter's troops, and they contributed to British successes at Hobkirk Hill (April 25) and the siege of Ninety Six (May 22 - June 19), as well as skirmishes at Biggin Church (July 16) and Parson's Plantation (August 7). It was also Fraser who at Ford's Plantation on July 7, 1781, captured Col. Isaac Hayne, whose hanging by the British on August 4 outraged Americans.

On August 30 Fraser's luck ran out at Parker's Ferry on Edisto River, when Marion drew him into an ambush in which about two hundred of his men were killed or wounded, his horse was shot, and he was trampled by his own fleeing horsemen.⁵ By February 1782 Fraser had recovered enough to aid Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson in successful attacks against Marion's troops at Wambaw Bridge and Tidyman's Plantation. Marion was reported to have drowned while fleeing at Tidyman's Plantation, and Fraser was not happy that the rumor proved false. Months later he was still "much disappointed at not meeting with Marriion or any part of his force... since we fell in with them at Mrs. Tiddymans."⁶

⁴ <http://www.redcoat.me.uk/uniforms.htm>

Ian Saberton, "The Revolutionary War in the South: Re-evaluations of Certain British and British American Actors," *Journal of the American Revolution*, Nov 21, 2016.

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/11/revolutionary-war-south-re-evaluations-certain-british-british-american-actors>

⁵ Patrick O'Kelley, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter (NBBS)* (Lillington, NC: Blue House Tavern Press, 2005), 3:322-27. Francis Marion to Nathanael Greene, Sep 3, 1781, in *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene (PNG)*, ed. Dennis M. Conrad (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997), 9:288-91.

⁶ Charles B. Baxley, David Neilan, and C. Leon Harris, "Outfoxed – Marion's Forces Dispersed by a Genius: Wambaw Bridge and Tidyman's Plantation February 24-

Black Dragoons

On August 28 Fraser set out with “100 Cavalry & Eight Militia.” Marion gave a similar estimate of Fraser’s strength: “The Enemy proved to be Major Frazier with a hundred horse & some Coulord Dragoons, all well mounted.”⁷ The “Coulord Dragoons” were former slaves who volunteered as British cavalrymen and were attached to Lt. Col. Benjamin Thompson in December 1781. At first referred to as Sepoy Troops, they were later known and feared as Black Dragoons.⁸ They soon made themselves known to Marion. At Videau’s Bridge near Cainhoy on January 3, 1782, they helped disperse a force that included some of Marion’s cavalry. They also participated in the defeat of Marion’s troops at Wambaw Bridge on February 24 and at Tidyman’s Plantation on the following day. Only days before the affair at Wadboo Plantation, 26 Black Dragoons skirmished with a dozen of Marion’s troops at Vanderhorst’s Whitehall Plantation about 10 miles northeast of Charlestown and were defeated.⁹

25, 1782.” *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 12(1.1), July 2018.

<http://www.southerncampaign.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Outfoxed-Wambaw-Creek-Bridge-and-Tidymans-Plantation.pdf>

Maj. Thomas Fraser to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, April 1782. NYPL, Emmet Collection. Series XXVIII. Miscellaneous Manuscripts. Digital Collections.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bf7696e4-7348-7321-e040-e00a180610c2/?uuid=bf7696e4-7349-7321-e040-e00a180610c2>

- ⁷ Maj. Thomas Fraser letter probably to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, Sep 4, 1782. NYPL, Archives & Manuscripts. Emmet Collection. Lossing’s Field Book of Revolution. EM6827. <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/927#c4956>
Marion to Greene, Aug 30, 1782, PNG, 11:606-08.

- ⁸ Gen. Alexander Leslie letter to Gen. Henry Clinton, Jan. 29, 1782. *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain*. Vol. II. (Boston, MA: Gregg Press, 1972). Available on Google Books: search for “Seapoy Troops.” “Sepoy” was British slang for indigenous troops, especially in India, serving the British Empire.

O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 4:23-24.

Jim Picuch, “Former slaves as British Cavalry in Revolutionary South Carolina.” *Carologue* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 12-15.

Jim Picuch, *Three Peoples, One King*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 316-18.

- ⁹ O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 4:22, 81. John C. Parker, Jr. *Parker’s Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina* 2nd Ed. (West Conshohocken PA: Infinity Publishing, 2013), 59, 131.

The Black Dragoons appear to have been unpopular on both sides. It would not have helped that they wore surplus uniforms of the notorious Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton’s British Legion, with green tunics and black, furry helmets.¹⁰ Collecting two guineas each for returning Hessian deserters dead or alive probably won them few friends among fellow soldiers. Among American troops in the South the sight of armed former slaves raised the specter of a violent uprising, and the very idea that slaves could be made into soldiers threatened the philosophical underpinning of slavery. Race itself may have had something to do with it, although Blacks were among American forces, including Marion’s.¹¹

The Black Dragoons were accused of “daily committing the most horrible depredations and murder” and seem to have acted like men expecting to die either in battle or on the gallows.¹² As escaped slaves bearing arms the latter was their likely fate if captured. On October 6, 1782, South Carolina Governor John Mathews advised Marion

There is but one way in which the negroes you mention are to be dealt with; that is, as they were taken in arms, they must be tried by the negro law; and, if found guilty, executed, unless there are any whose cases are so favorable as to induce the court to recommend them to mercy, and the executive authority interpose and pardon them. Exemplary punishments on such notorious offenders will have a very salutary effect, especially at this time.¹³

¹⁰ Don Troiani, email to C. Leon Harris, Oct 22, 2018. See bridgemanimages.com image DTA3026816.

¹¹ Bobby G. Moss and Michael C. Scoggins, *African-American Patriots in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution*. (Blacksburg, SC: Scotia-Hibernia Press, 2004) For example, Jim Capers, federal pension application R1669. <http://revwarapps.org/r1669.pdf>

¹² Charles Cotesworth Pinckney quoted by Picuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 317.

¹³ R. W. Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution*. (New York: D. Appleton, 1857), 3:232-33. <https://archive.org/details/gibbsdocument03gibbrich/page/232>

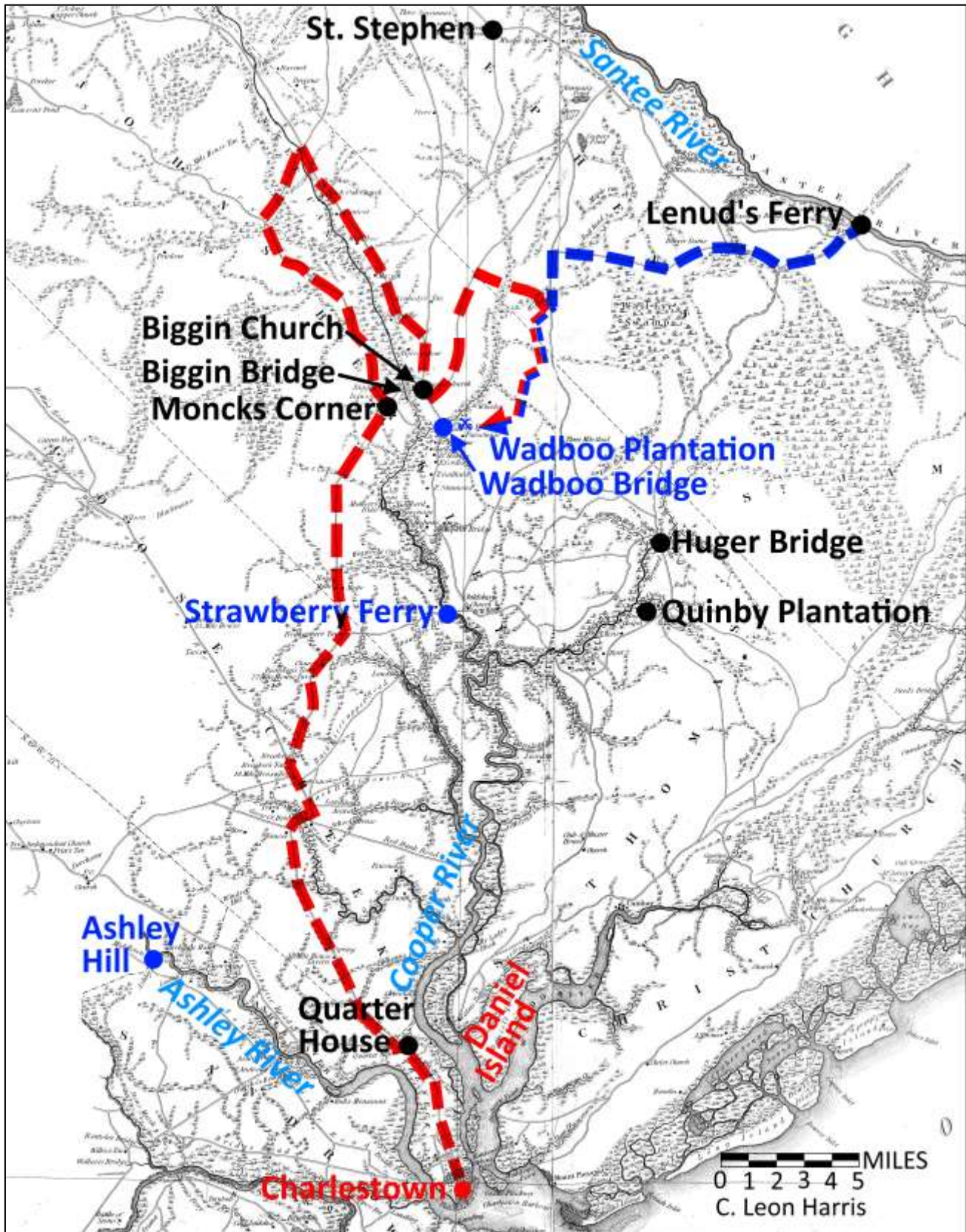


Fig. 2. Probable routes to Wadboo Plantation taken by Marion on August 28, 1782 (blue) and by Fraser on the same day and on August 29 (red). Base map is *Mills Atlas Charleston District*, published in 1825. In this and the following maps north is toward the top. <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/rma/id/44/rec/6>

Fraser's Route to Wadboo

Fraser's South Carolina Royalists and Black Dragoons were at Moncks Corner by sunrise on August 29, 1782. On the way they took several prisoners who told them that Marion and his brigade had arrived the night before at Wadboo Plantation just across the West Branch of Cooper River (Fig. 2).¹⁴ Fraser was no doubt delighted to hear that Marion was only a few miles away. He later wrote that his intention was merely to "move towards [Marion] and find out his real Strength and Situation," but a glance at Figure 2 shows that he literally went out of his way to engage Marion.¹⁵ Biggin Bridge had been destroyed, so Fraser rode northward about six miles to cross Biggin Swamp, then back southward.¹⁶ Near the remains of Biggin Church¹⁷ (burned by the British on July 16, 1781) he found that Marion's pickets were guarding Wadboo Bridge (Fig. 3), so he made another detour: "Watboo Creek being in his [Marion's] Front & having a Pickett upon the Bridge I did not think it Prudent to Attack him by that Road but moved up that Creek and Crossed Four Miles Higher and came down on his Rear."



Fig. 3. Wadboo Creek northeast from present Wadboo Bridge. (Photo by C. Leon Harris)

Mills Atlas shows roads that Fraser could have used from Charlestown to Biggin Church and up Wadboo Creek, but none spanning the two miles across Wadboo Creek and swamp. The causeway said to have been used by Fraser was still present in 1901, and LiDAR imagery shows a feature across Wadboo Creek about four miles from Biggin Church that we assume is the causeway (Figs. 4 and 5)¹⁸. Together with Labeau Place it spans the gap from Old Cherry Hill Road to Wadboo Road A. Figure 6 shows the entire route Fraser may have taken from Biggin Church to Wadboo Plantation.



Fig. 4. LiDAR image showing the possible 0.4-mile causeway from the end of Labeau Place across Wadboo Creek and swamp to present Wadboo Road A. (Courtesy of Mike Yianopoulos and Doug Bostick.)

¹⁴ Fraser letter, Sep 4, 1782. NYPL, Emmet Collection, EM 6827. The skirmish at Wadboo is sometimes erroneously said to have occurred at Fairlawn Plantation near Moncks Corner. Henry A. M. Smith, "Notes and Queries." *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 2, no. 3 (Jul, 1901), 246-48.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27574959>

¹⁵ Fraser letter, Sep 8, 1782. In his letter to Gen. Guy Carleton, Leslie gave a different reason for Fraser's advance against Marion: "seeing the necessity of making a good countenance to secure his retreat, [Fraser] advanced towards the Camp." U. Michigan, Clements Lib., British HQ Papers, Vol. 48, No. 5562.

John Richbourg in his federal pension application S18175 suggested that Fraser was actually after the cattle Marion had at Wadboo. "General Marion crossed Santee at Leneud's ferry... & returned to Wadboo - where we had left a number of beef cattle and 30 men to guard them from the enemy, the British hearing (from the Tories) that there was but 30 men left for guard attempted to get the cattle. General Marion had returned earlier than he had expected to do." Transcribed by Will Graves.

<http://revwarapps.org/s18175.pdf>

¹⁶ On Aug 30, 1782 Marion reported to Gov. John Mathews that Fraser crossed "above Bigging Bridge, at Fardo's Plantation." We have been unable to identify a person named Fardo. Henry A. M. Smith, Gen. Marion's Report of the Affair at Wadboo. *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 17, no. 4 (Oct 1916), 176-77.

<https://vdocuments.site/gen-marions-report-of-the-affair-at-wadboo.htm>

¹⁷ Formally known as St. James Berkeley Parish Church.

¹⁸ Smith, "Notes and queries," 247-48.



Fig. 5. The presumed causeway shown in Fig. 4. Approximately 10 feet wide at the top. (Photo by C. Leon Harris)



Fig. 6. Possible route of Fraser from Biggin Church to Marion's camp at Wadboo Plantation. The rectangle in the upper right encloses the area of Fig. 4. Base map is USGS Cordesville SC.

Marion's Unlikely Ally, Micajah Ganey

Fraser stated that Marion had about 300 men at Wadboo Plantation. Each side usually exaggerated the number of enemy, but it seems likely that with four known companies Marion's men outnumbered Fraser's. (See the order of battle at the end of this report.) With Marion's troops were about 40 former Tories under Maj. Micajah Ganey.

The presence of Micajah Ganey and his troops was galling to Marion's men. Ganey had served under Marion when Marion was a captain in the Second South Carolina Continental Regiment, but he switched sides after a fellow Whig stole some of his horses.¹⁹ Ganey accepted a British commission as major and became Marion's archenemy. Following the surrender of Charlestown on May 12, 1780, Maj. Ganey did all in his power to interfere with Marion's partisan operations in the eastern part of the state along Pee Dee River. At Blue Savannah on September 4, 1780, Marion attacked a superior force commanded by Ganey, killing and wounding many and driving the rest "into an impassible swamp to all but Toreys."²⁰ Ganey had even worse luck on the following October 9 when he was stabbed in the back with a bayonet during a daring raid by Marion on Georgetown. Ganey managed to ride away with the bayonet sticking out of his back, and Marion assumed he had been mortally wounded.²¹

As with Marion at Tidyman's, reports of Ganey's death proved to be greatly exaggerated. Ganey recovered after several months, but by then the tide of war was turning in South Carolina. Marion, together with Lt. Col. Henry Lee, Gen. Thomas Sumter, and others in coordination with Gen. Nathanael Greene, were slowly pushing the British from their outposts toward Charlestown. Marion began planning for the end-game and eventual reconciliation with Tories. During the siege of Fort Motte in May 1781 he reportedly gave orders to stop hanging Tories. "He said let them [en]list during the war & watch them close & they would make good

¹⁹ Oller, *Swamp Fox*, 59.

²⁰ Col. Francis Marion to Gen. Horatio Gates, Sep. 15, 1780. *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina (CSRNC)*, 14:616-18.
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr14-0518>

²¹ Marion to Gates, Oct. 15, 1780. *CSRNC*, 14:621-22.
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr14-0520> Federal pension application of William Shaw S19078 <http://revwarapps.org/s19078.pdf>

soldiers.”²² On the following June 17 Col. Peter Horry on behalf of Marion concluded a truce with Ganey’s Loyalists that was to last one year.²³

On May 21, 1782, weeks before the truce was to expire, Marion wrote to Horry that a British officer had told him that “we shall very soon take one another by the hand in friendship.” On June 2 Marion wrote to Ganey that he was sending Horry and two other officers who would give him a paper proving “the determination of the British making peace with the Americans, which leaves you no hope of being supported by them.” Marion also warned that he was marching with his brigade toward Ganey “for the purpose of either making terms, or prosecuting the war, whenever the term of the truce expires.”²⁴

Marion’s overtures to Ganey did not sit well with some of his officers and probably many of the troops, who regarded Ganey “in no better light than a leader of banditti.”²⁵ After tense negotiations, however, Marion and Ganey signed a new truce on June 8, 1782, and Ganey and about 40 of his men united with Marion’s brigade.²⁶ The engagement at Wadboo Plantation would test the wisdom of Marion’s policy of tactical reconciliation.

The Field of Battle

Wadboo Plantation was part of Wadboo Barony, a 12,000-acre tract granted in 1683 to James Colleton, son of Lord Proprietor John Colleton. The younger Colleton built a stone mansion in 1684 and is thought to have lived there as Governor from 1686 until he was banished in 1690. By the Revolutionary War Wadboo Barony reverted to Sir James Nassau Colleton in England. Assuming Colleton was a Loyalist, the South Carolina legislature confiscated Wadboo Barony early in 1782.²⁷

On August 28, after supervising the construction of defenses at Georgetown, Marion went by Lenud’s Ferry to his camp at Wadboo Plantation. Marion had a guard six miles south at Strawberry Ferry, and Maj. Daniel Conyers’s cavalry were scouting near there. The next day at about 10 AM Marion received intelligence that Fraser was moving northward from Charlestown. Believing that he intended to attack Strawberry Ferry, Marion “immediately sent to Call in that [guard] at Strawberry & to Major Conyers who was in that Neighbourhood to Join me.” Marion soon learned that Fraser had bypassed Strawberry Ferry and was coming from the east: “Immediately after I had Intelligen [sic] that the Enemy had crossed the swamp above Begin Bridge & was coming round me.”²⁸ Marion then realized that he was the target.

A cavalry battle was impossible, because forage was so scarce at Wadboo that Marion’s horses, except for those of officers, had been sent six miles away. The ground between Marion’s camp and Fraser was open field for a mile, so ambushing Fraser along the way was out of the question.²⁹ Marion therefore planned a defense. He “drew up in an avenue of trees before the house a part of my Left Advanced a few paces under cover of three small houses.” We assume that the “avenue of trees” was the road to the mansion as shown in plats made in 1783 and 1791 (Fig 7). The 1783 plat shows the lane to the mansion, and the 1791 survey shows the mansion and small houses in more detail.

²² Federal pension application S9337 of Arthur Fuller transcribed by Will Graves.

<http://revwarapps.org/s9337.pdf>

²³ Gibbes, *Documentary History* 2:98-99.

<https://archive.org/stream/gibbsdocument02gibbrich#page/98/mode/1up>

Ganey, considering the treaty binding only in South Carolina, continued operations in North Carolina with David Fanning. Hershel Parker, “Fanning Outfoxes Marion,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, Oct 8, 2014.

<https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/10/fanning-outfoxes-marion>

²⁴ Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 3:177, 183.

<https://archive.org/stream/gibbsdocument03gibbrich#page/177/mode/1up>

In the latter half of 1781 Gov. Rutledge promised amnesty to Tories who would serve in the American cause for six months. Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 2:175-78.

<https://archive.org/stream/gibbsdocument02gibbrich#page/175/mode/1up> It is noteworthy that Marion’s diplomacy succeeded in recruiting Ganey where Rutledge’s proclamation failed.

²⁵ Alexander Garden, *Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America*. (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822), 27.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=WJ98ynQ-W-AC&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

²⁶ O’Kelley, *NBBS*, 4:73-75.

²⁷ Henry A. M. Smith, “The Baronies of South Carolina. IV. Wadboo Barony.” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 12, no. 2 (Apr, 1911), 43-52.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27575294.pdf>

<https://south-carolina-plantations.com/berkeley/wadboo.html>

²⁸ Marion to Greene, Aug. 30, 1782. Maj. Daniel Conyers did not arrive until an hour after the engagement ended. *PNG*, 11:606-08

²⁹ William Dobein James, *A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion*. (Charleston, SC: Gould and Riley, 1821), 169. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/923>

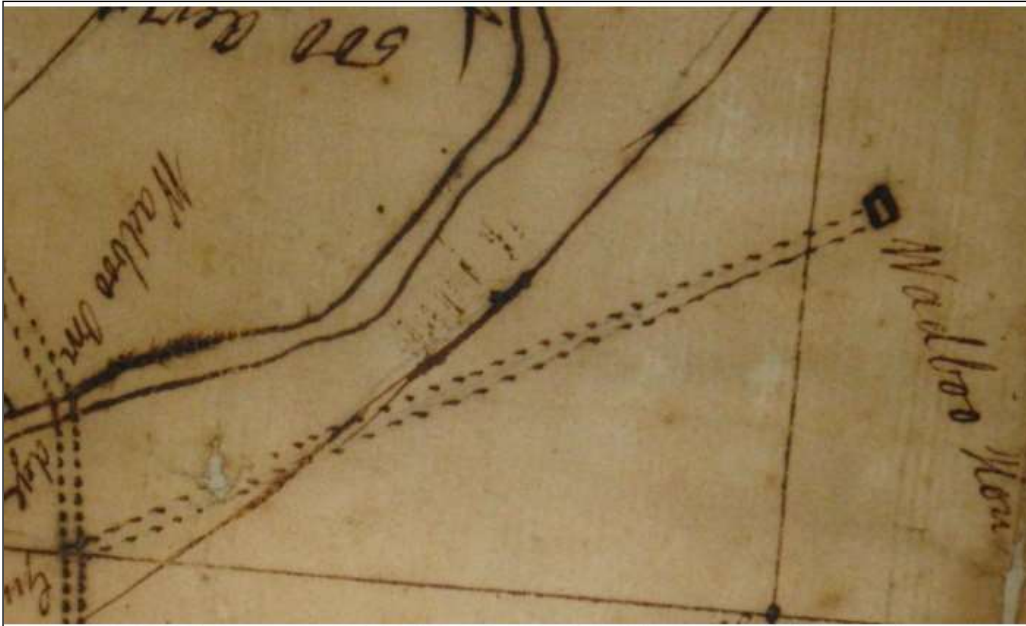


Fig. 7. 1783 and 1791 plats showing the lane to Wadboo House. (Top) Detail from "Wadboo Barony Surveyed and subdivided by order of the Commissioners of the forfeited estate of South Carolina AD 1783." This excerpt also shows part of the road from Biggin Church to the south, across Wadboo Bridge. It continued past Mepkin plantation to Strawberry Ferry. (SC Historical Society plat, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston.)



(Middle) Detail from "Plan of a Tract of land situated on Wadboo Creek in St Johns Parish... part of Wadboo Barony sold under confiscation and is Lot N9... From Survey taken in February 1791." This excerpt covers the same area as above. Wadboo House is labeled "Mr. de Tollinere's Settlement." Lanes to the north and south were apparently constructed after 1783, probably because the earlier lane was interrupted by the property to the west. (SC Historical Society plat.)



(Bottom) Tracing of the 1,100-yard approach road from the 1783 plat, with Wadboo House, other buildings, and the fence from the 1791 survey, onto a satellite image. (Google Earth).

William Dobein James, who had been a soldier under Marion, provided a more detailed description of Marion's defense at Wadboo Plantation:

It had been deserted by the owner, who was attached to the enemy, and the mansion and two extensive ranges of negro and other outhouses were left open for [Marion] and men. He occupied the mansion and his men the outhouses, on the west towards the bridge; on the back of the outhouses to the east, and directly in front of the dwelling, there stretched towards the road an extensive avenue of old cedar trees,³⁰ the trimming of which had been neglected for some years; and their long boughs now descended nearly to the ground. Gen. Marion heard of the approach of Major Fraser with the British cavalry, towards the Santee, in his rear. On this side there was nothing but an open old field for a mile.³¹

Figure 8 represents the setting based on descriptions by Marion and James, Figure 7, and an archaeological report by Steven D. Smith of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.³² We initially considered that the avenue would have been northward toward the creek, like oak allees in the Lowcountry leading to rivers or creeks, which were the main modes of transportation. At Wadboo Plantation, however, there is a bluff and a marsh between the house and the creek, and it is not clear that Wadboo Creek was navigable there. We therefore assume that the avenue of cedars was the lane to the mansion in the 1783 plat.

Further information about the situation of the combatants may be inferred from Smith's report of bullets and whether fired or unfired. Both sides were using smooth-bore muskets of a variety of calibers, so not much can be determined from the small number (9) of musket balls recovered.³³ Marion's troops, however, were loading buckshot with the musket balls, and some were firing rifles. Unfired buckshot and rifle balls would suggest the position of Marion's men during the engagement, but since Marion used Wadboo Plantation as a camp for several months afterward, unfired buckshot might have been dropped during that period. We therefore consider only fired buckshot and rifle balls,

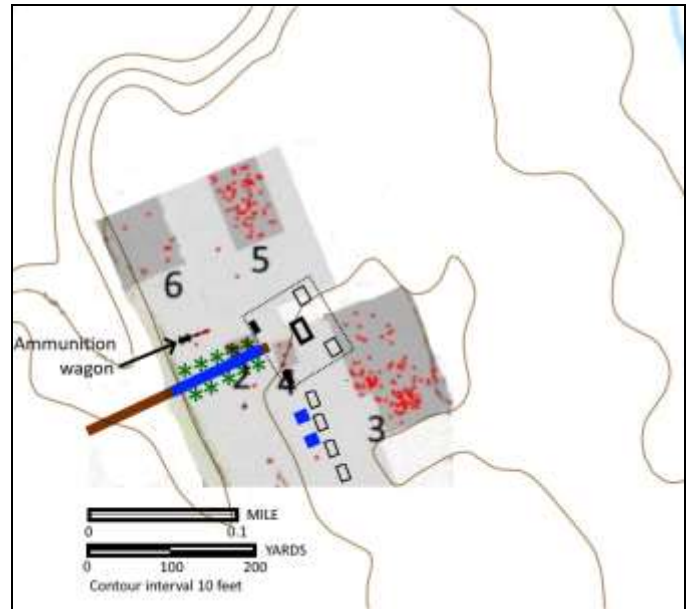


Fig. 8. Marion's initial position facing south (blue) in the avenue of cedars and at the outbuildings as interpreted from accounts by Marion and James and from artifacts reported by Steven D. Smith (red dots from Smith's Fig. 3.1). Large numerals indicate areas that were systematically searched by Smith. The number and location of the outbuildings may have changed between the time of the battle and the 1791 survey. The position of the ammunition wagon west of the main house is conjectural. North is up.

which would suggest the position of Fraser's forces. Although the sword was the main cavalry weapon, some of Fraser's troops had carbines. Unfired carbine balls may therefore indicate the location of Fraser's troops, and fired carbine balls that of Marion's.

The relatively large number (21) of fired rifle bullets and buckshot in area 3 suggests that Fraser's troops were in that area when fired upon by Marion's troops (Fig. 9). The number of unfired carbine balls (9) is consistent with that interpretation. The distribution, with most of the rifle balls and buckshot to the northwest and the dropped carbine balls to the southeast, is particularly informative. Smith (p. 16) concluded from nonlethal military artifacts that area 3 was part of Marion's encampment after the engagement, but that does not rule out its having also been the scene of fighting.

Smith (p. 14) concluded from the large number of fired and unfired lead shot in area 5 that it appeared to be "the Wadboo battlefield." This is consistent with the number of fired rifle balls (10) and buckshot (7). In addition, one unfired .75-caliber (British Brown Bess) ball was found in area 5. The six fired carbine bullets are not easily explained unless they were from the action in area 3.

³⁰ Eastern red cedar *Juniperus virginiana*, a common species in the area.

³¹ James, *Sketch*, 169.

³² Steven D. Smith, *et al.* "Archaeological Evaluation of Wadboo Plantation, 38BK464." (South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina. 2008.)

³³ Smith, "Archaeological Evaluation," 23.

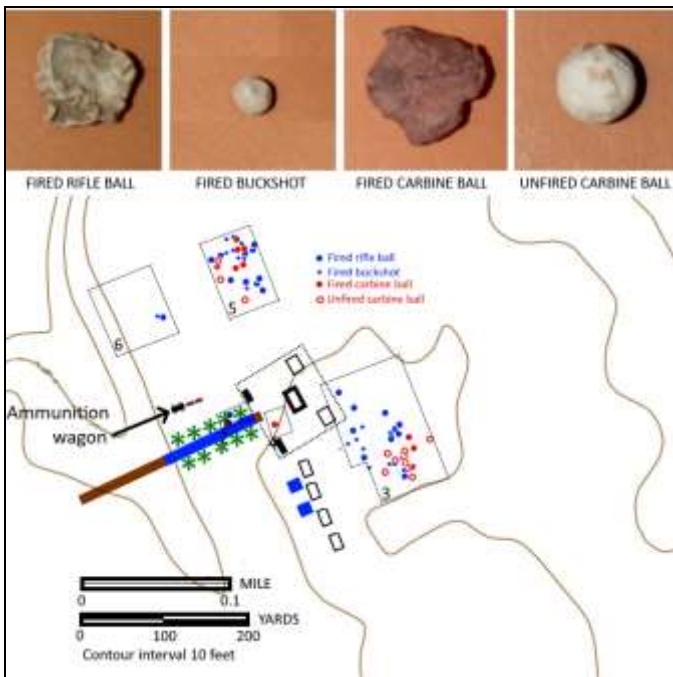


Fig. 9. Archaeological evidence used in analyzing the engagement. The top images show examples of the artifacts used, and the map shows their distribution as reported by Smith. All the images are at the same scale. The diameter of the fired buckshot is 0.290" and that of the unfired carbine ball is 0.613". In the map the rifle balls and buckshot likely to have been fired by Marion's troops are indicated in blue, and carbine balls used by the British are indicated by red circles (filled if fired, open if unfired). North is up. (Photographs courtesy of Drew Ruddy)

We interpret the archaeological evidence as indicating that areas 3 and 5 were locations where Fraser's men were fired at by Marion's. Smith (p. 15) noted that area 6 may also have seen fighting, but there was a scarcity of evidence due to relic collecting.

Phase 1: Fraser Drives in Marion's Videttes

While his men were getting into position along the avenue of cedars and three of the smaller houses, Marion sent Capt. Gavin Witherspoon and some other officers who had horses to keep an eye out for Fraser. They did not have to wait long. "The Enemy appeared in sight, as soon as I had made my Disposition they came on in a full Charge."³⁴ (Figs. 10, 11)



Fig. 10. Recent photograph from the southeast corner of area 3 in the direction (northwest) that Fraser is thought to have charged toward the mansion, which was beyond the trees in the center. (C. Leon Harris)

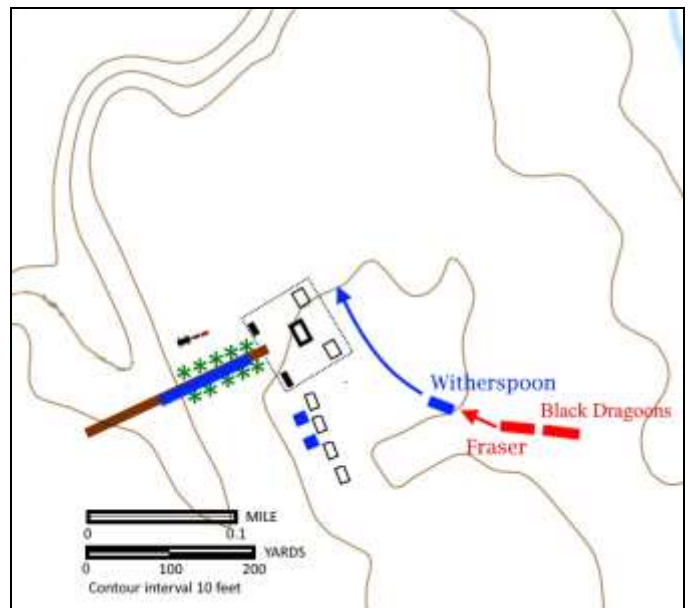


Fig. 11. Phase 1 of the skirmish at Wadboo Plantation. Part of Fraser's corps chases Capt. Witherspoon and the other videttes through the field toward the houses while most of Marion's troops (blue) remain on the avenue of cedars. North is up.

³⁴ Marion to Greene, Aug 30, 1782, *PNG*, 11:606-08.

According to James, Witherspoon

had advanced but little way into the woods beyond the old field, when the reconnoitring party were met by Major Fraser at the head of his corps of cavalry, and were immediately charged. A long chase commenced, which was soon observed by Marion, and he drew up his men under the thick boughs of the cedar trees. As the chase advanced towards him it became more and more interesting. When in full view, either Witherspoon's horse had failed him, or he fell purposely in the rear to bring up his party, and a British dragoon was detached to cut him down. He advanced until nearly within his sword's length, and was rising in his stirrups to make sure of his blow, but Witherspoon had eyed him well, and at the instant, Parthian like [rearward], he fired the contents of his gun into his breast. The good omen excited much animation.³⁵

This action may account for fired carbine and rifle balls in area 3. Fraser's account is hard to reconcile with those of Marion and James. Fraser stated that he

fell in with [Marion's] Picket about a Quarter of a Mile from his Camp our Advance took two of them Prisoners & Killed some Others, and in following those that got away, We got under the Fire of Marrion's Main Body Consisting of about 300 Men which were formed near the Brick House at Watboo, and a Number of them Posted in it & in the Log Houses and Negroe Hutts adjacent A Scattering Fire from them Wounded Capt. Dawkins and killed one Private.³⁶

Phase 2: Marion's Left Repels Fraser's Charge

James stated that after Witherspoon's Parthian shot, "the British, still advancing, attempted to charge upon the left, but were received on that side with a well directed fire, which caused them to break and fly in great disorder." Although excited by the contest playing before them, Marion's men concealed among the houses held their fire until Marion gave the order. Marion "let them come within thirty yards and threw in a fire from [his] left."³⁷ (Fig. 12)

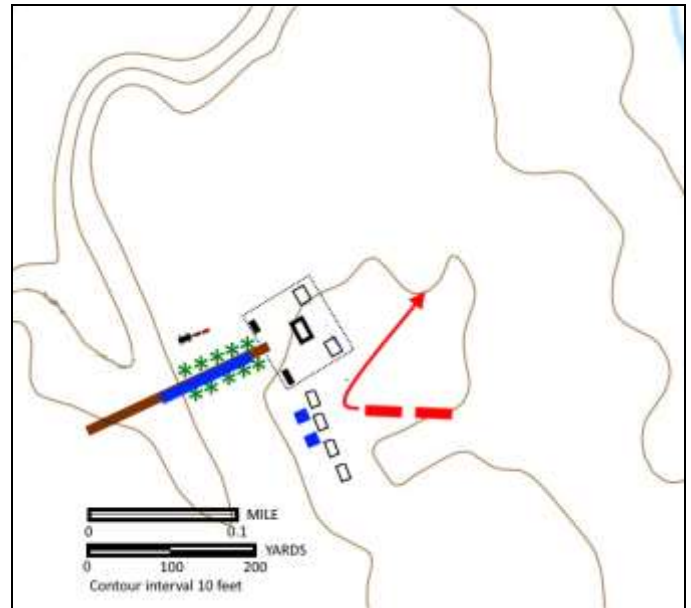


Fig. 12. Phase 2. Fire from Marion's left at the buildings repels Fraser's charge. Fraser's troops are shown as having been in area 3 of Fig. 8. North is up.

"The fire was so well directed," Marion wrote, "that the Enemy immediately broke and Retreated in Confusion, leaving a Capt'n Robert Gillis [Gillies] and three men and five horses killed." We believe the action in phase 2 accounts for most of the fired rifle balls and buckshot, as well as the unfired carbine balls, in area 3.

Fraser had been lured into an ambush not unlike the one at Parker's Ferry, but his report to Leslie again gives a very different impression:

I was so encouraged by seeing the Confusion which this irregular Charge Produced among them that I immediately ordered up the Rest of the Cavalry. Numbers of them fled and nothing but their being in the Houses and have Strengthened the Fence round them could have prevented their being taken We lost in this second Attempt Capt Gilles Killed, three Dragoons wounded and one taken Prisoner besides Ten Horses Killed and Wounded.³⁸

³⁵ James, *Sketch*, 169-170. James says the field was a mile across.

³⁶ Fraser to Balfour, Sep 4, 1782. NYPL, Emmet Collection, EM 6827.

³⁷ Smith, "Gen. Marion's Report," 176-77.

³⁸ Fraser to Balfour, Sep 4, 1782. NYPL, Emmet Collection, EM 6827.

Phase 3: Capture of Marion's Ammunition Wagon

According to Marion, Fraser ordered up the rest of his cavalry and made repeated attempts to attack his flank: "They several times Indeavourd to come round me, but found I changed front & took the Advantage of the houses & fences they dare not come within reach of our muskets."³⁹ James gave a similar account: "The enemy rallied and manoeuvred about in the old field for an hour, making several different feints of charging, but never coming in reach of Marion's fire, whose men stood firm at their post."⁴⁰ We believe this phase accounts for the lead artifacts found in area 5 of Fig. 8.

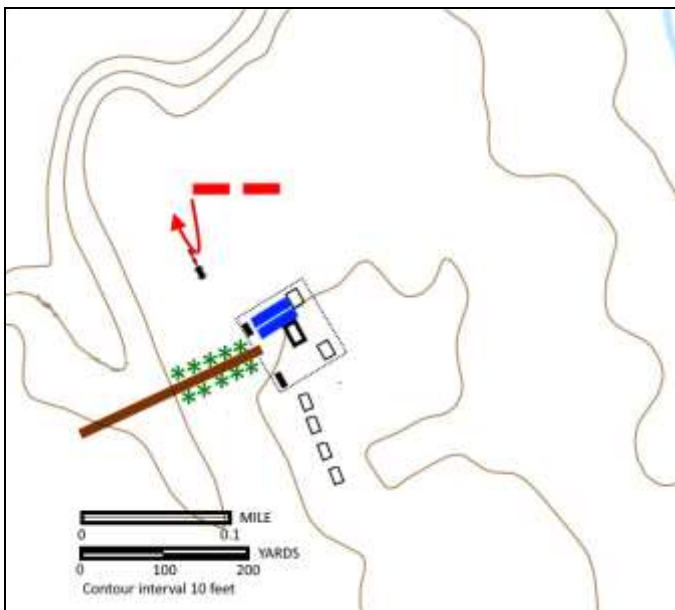


Fig. 13. Phase 3. Fraser tries to draw Marion's troops away from the buildings and fence while remaining out of musket range. Marion's ammunition wagon is flushed into the open and eventually captured. Fraser's main line is represented as being in area 5, and the capture of the wagon in area 6 of Fig. 8.

Probably during phase 3, the British captured Marion's ammunition wagon with some baggage when "the driver in a fright rund of with, Contrary to Orders, & took a rout which brought them so near the Enemy as they could see from where they had formed in a Large Open field. I had no Caveldry, but got five men who had swords to Charge them. They did & retook the wagon, brought it some distance when they was Oblige to give it up to a surperior force." Marion explained to Gov. Mathews that the wagon "was within One hundred yards of the Main body, and we could not Remove from our position

without giving the Enemy the greatest advantage in an Open field, which is what they desired to do."

Fraser wrote to Leslie that "We took from them a Waggon loaded with Ammunition & their Batt Horses loaded with their Baggage and remained about an Hour & a half on the Ground in hopes that they would be tempted from the superiority of their Numbers to come out and fight us, However this they declined." It is equally true that Fraser declined to charge among the houses into Marion's musket and rifle fire. A charge by either side would have been suicidal.

Consequences

On August 29 when Marion wrote to Greene he thought his only loss had been the ammunition wagon, but later he learned that before or after the engagement Fraser "tok two of my out picquets which I did not know when I wrought [wrote] you my last, & two men more on the road five miles from here one they Cut badly, the other they paroled."⁴¹

Marion stated that "the Enemy Beury'd five men on the road from here to Hugers Bridge. Had three Officers & Six privates & two Neegros wounded."⁴² Fraser admitted that he had lost two men killed and four wounded. In the initial action (phase 1) Capt. George Dawkins of the South Carolina Royalists was wounded, and a private was killed (presumably by the Parthian shot by Witherspoon). In the attack against Marion's main body (phase 2) Capt. Robert Gillies of the North Carolina Independent Dragoons was killed, three dragoons were wounded, and one man was taken prisoner. Fraser did not estimate Marion's losses, but he wrote to Leslie that he could not help thinking they far exceeded his own.

Marion informed Greene that Ganey and other former Tories had justified his trust in them. "The Malitia tho the Greatest part was new made wigs [Whigs] behaved with great spirit not one offered to give way, but wished to pursue them in the Open field, but that woud have given the enemy too great an Advantage."

⁴¹ Marion to Greene, Sep 2, 1782, PNG, 11:606-08. John Stewart (Federal pension application S7621) also believed that "the Americans sustained no injury except the loss of a wagon containing their ammunition &c."

<http://revwarapps.org/s7621.pdf>

⁴² Marion to Greene, Sep 2, 1782, PNG, 11:606-08. John Richbourg (Federal pension application S18175) stated that three of the enemy were killed.

<http://revwarapps.org/s18175.pdf>

³⁹ Marion to Greene, Aug 30, 1782, PNG, 11:606-08.

⁴⁰ James, *Sketch*, 170.

Aftermath

When Capt. Daniel Conyers of the Kingstree Militia arrived after the engagement, Marion sent him after Fraser, but according to Fraser, Conyers “never thought Proper to come within sight of us.” Marion expected Fraser to renew the attack, so in spite of a shortage of ammunition he set an ambush. “The state Caveldry fit for duty is not more than thirty at present. The Loss of my Ammunition Waggon, Leave me not more than three rounds pr Man & I have Just heard Major Frazer is Joined by a body of Infantry & Returned to Quinby Last night I expected they woud have com on & I Laid an Ambuscade in the road they must come. I stayed all night in hopes of Giving them the Last Load we had.”⁴³ With Fraser reenforced, being short on ammunition, and his situation at Wadboo Plantation known to Fraser, Marion thought it wise to retire to St. Stephen to wait for ammunition from Georgetown.

Fraser was thwarted in his desire for revenge, but on his withdrawal he took 10 prisoners, possibly Whig civilians, five of whom were so badly wounded he had to leave them behind. He also had Marion’s wagon and some livestock as a consolation. “We proceeded on towards Huger’s [Huger] Bridge and collected from thence to Thomas’s Parish and Daniel’s Island 100 and odd Head of Cattle & Fifty Sheep without any Molestation.”⁴⁴ This may have been fewer cattle than he expected. They took Thomas Darrington’s “whole flock of cattle; and while he was fretting about the loss, a thought occurred to him that they might return, as his bull was among them, and this bull was famous for breaking through every fence, of which he could reach the top rail with his horns. Mr. Darrington stuttered, and went on to say, that he raised his head, he saw his ‘bu-bu-bull strolling home, followed by all his herd of cattle.’”⁴⁵

Only the most brazen book publisher would claim that the affair at Wadboo Plantation was a turning point in the Revolutionary War, but it could have been more consequential. The Americans gained little by Marion’s victory, but they might have lost much by a defeat. Marion’s absence would have relieved the pressure on

the British, and civil war between Tories and Whigs would probably have continued. As it happened, the British evacuated Charlestown on the following December 14, there was remarkably little postwar retribution, and the final treaty of peace was signed on September 13, 1783.

Maj. Thomas Fraser was not among the evacuees. He stayed in South Carolina where he married, established lumber mills along Edisto River, and became a merchant. He died in Philadelphia on May 31, 1820.⁴⁶ Micajah Ganey returned to his native North Carolina and is said to have again taken up arms against the British in the War of 1812. He died in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, on May 12, 1832.⁴⁷ The Black Dragoons preferred emigration to the risk of hanging or re-enslavement. Together with a unit called the Black Pioneers they formed the Carolina Black Corps, which served in the British Caribbean until 1798, when they were incorporated into the First West India Regiment.⁴⁸

South Carolina divided Wadboo Barony into 24 lots of 500 acres each and sold them to pay soldiers’ bounties.⁴⁹ After the war James Nassau Colleton became a citizen of South Carolina and was repaid for Wadboo Barony in depreciated currency, but he never recovered the property.⁵⁰ Wadboo Plantation passed through a succession of owners, and by 1791 the outbuildings and road had been modified.⁵¹ By 1911 it was abandoned, and the house was in ruins. The property is now privately owned.

⁴⁶<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11324371/thomas-fraser>

⁴⁷ Ernest Perry Rowe, Jr.
https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/12880790/person/13949759505/media/bc77d692-9e3b-47ff-b234-afe3638b9518?_phsrc=KTr1547&_phstart=successSource

⁴⁸ Gary Sellick, “Black Men, Red Coats: The Carolina Corps, Race, and Society in the Revolutionary British Atlantic.” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2018).

⁴⁹ Smith, “Baronies of South Carolina,” 43-52.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27575294.pdf>
<https://south-carolina-plantations.com/berkeley/wadboo.html>

⁵⁰ Kathy Roe Coker, “The Case of James Nassau Colleton before the Commissioners of Forfeited Estates.” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 87, no. 2 (Apr 1986), 106-16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27567950>

⁵¹ South Carolina Historical Society 1791 plat. Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 33-62-06.

⁴³ Marion to Greene, Sep 2, 1782, *PNG*, 11:620-21.

⁴⁴ Fraser to Balfour, Sep 4, 1782, NYPL, Emmet Collection, EM 6827. See also the *Royal South-Carolina Gazette*, Sep 12, 1782.

⁴⁵ Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South*. (Charleston: Walker & James, 1851), 379. Available on Google Books.

Marion's Farewell at the Avenue of Cedars

After being reenforced and resupplied at St. Stephen, Marion returned to Wadboo Plantation by September 20 and made his camp there until the day after the British evacuation. The civil authorities had decided that militiamen in motley attire and high spirits were unsuitable for the august ceremony of the British evacuation. General Marion also held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant in the Continental army and was invited to attend, but he remained with his militiamen at Wadboo Plantation. "In his favourite encampment at Watboo, and on the side of the cedar trees, he thanked his officers and men for their many and useful services, and bid them a friendly and affectionate farewell."⁵²

From General Orders at Wadboo Dec'r 15th 1782:

General Marion Congratulates the troops under his command on the Evacuation of Charles Town. This Happy Event has made it unnecessary for the country Militia being Kept any longer in the field. He therefore discharges them. The General returns his warmest thanks to the officers and men who with unwearied patience & Fortitude have under gone the greatest fatigues and Hardships & with a Spirit & Bravery which must ever reflect the Highest honour on them. No Citysins in the world Have ever done more [than] they have. He begs leave to give his Particular thanks to all the Officers & Men of the Country Militia for that Partiality to his Person & ready Obedience to all Orders for two years And an half, which will be Remember'd with Gratitude To the end of his life. He will always consider them with the Affection of a Brother & will be happy to Render them every Service in his power – he cannot doubt in the least of their Readiness to turn out Should their Country be ever again so unhappy as to be invaded by her cruel & barbarous Enemys. He wishes them a long Continuance of happiness & the Blessing of Peace.⁵³

Order of Battle⁵⁴ Forces at the skirmish at Wadboo Plantation on August 29, 1782.

AMERICAN

Marion's Militia Brigade

Brig. Gen. Francis Marion – Commanding

Lt. Col. Alexander Swinton⁵⁵

Capt. Gavin Witherspoon of Berkeley County

Capt. Peter Dubose of Cheraws District⁵⁶

Capt. John Rogers of Lower Craven County⁵⁷

Maj. Micajah Ganey

BRITISH-LOYALIST

South Carolina Royalists (provincials)

Maj. Thomas Fraser – Commanding

Capt. George Dawkins (WIA)

Campbell's Troop of Light Dragoons

Lt. Stephen Jarvis⁵⁸

North Carolina Independent Dragoons

Capt. Robert Gillies (KIA)

Independent Troop of Black Dragoons

Capt. March⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Officers mentioned in the present report or in sources noted below. It is not known whether all or any of the troops under each captain were from the captain's district.

⁵⁵ John Stewart federal pension application S7621.

<http://revwarapps.org/s7621.pdf>

⁵⁶ Peter Dubose federal pension application S21163.

<http://revwarapps.org/s21163.pdf>

⁵⁷ Thomas Grice federal pension application R4301.

<http://revwarapps.org/r4301.pdf>

⁵⁸ J. D. Lewis. carolana.com.

http://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_wadboo_swamp.html; "Journal of Colonel Stephen Jarvis", *Journal of American History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1907, 442.

⁵⁹ Piecuch, "Former slaves," 15 includes a payroll for the 92-day period ending on September 20, 1782 listing a total of 30 officers and men in the Black Dragoons. Like other slaves, Capt. March had only a given name.

⁵² James, *Sketch*, 176.

⁵³ Patrick O'Kelley, *Unwearied Patience and Fortitude: Francis Marion's Orderly Book*. (West Conshohocken PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 583.

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